

The Abuse of Mercy stated and reproved

IN A
SERMON

Preach'd on the 5th of *March*, 1741.

AT A
MONTHLY EXERCISE,

At the Rev^d. Mr. GOODWIN's

MEETING-PLACE,

In *Little More-Fields*.

By SAMUEL WILSON.

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MEETING

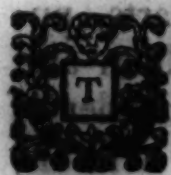


(1851)



ISAIAH V. 3, 4, 5, 6.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard, What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go too; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged, but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.



O know all things, with the strictest accuracy, and infallible certainty, and by one intuitive view to take in all events which have been, are, or shall be, is one of the essential

tial and incommunicable glories of *Jebo-
vab*, as a GOD of knowledge whose understanding is infinite.

IT is impossible that the Most High should be surpris'd with any unforeseen incident, for known unto him are all his works from the beginning. None can disannul his purpose, for he worketh all things after the council of his own will, and the thoughts of his heart stand throughout all generations.

THAT which is the most contingent or fortuitous in itself, or which may seem greatly, if not entirely, to depend on the free-will of the reasonable creature, if *future*, is present in his all-comprehending mind: not that the divine foreknowledge and decree, put any farther efficacy into the event, than by the voluntary operation of second causes to render it certain and determinate: and where these second causes act wickedly, GOD is by no means to be considered as infusing the vicious habit, or forcing them into a criminal conduct; but righteously leaves transgressors who have abused his mercy, to the blindness of their eyes, and the hardness of their hearts, punishing them for their wilful rebellion and impiety. Thus, in the execrable murder of our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle tells us,
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he was ^a delivered by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, and with wicked hands crucified and slain.

WHENEVER therefore we meet with any passages of scripture which seem to represent God as surpris'd, disappointed, or repenting, we are to understand them as spoken after the manner of men, in great condescension to our weakness and imperfection.

THUS, as to the text, it is most certain, God well knew what *Israel* would be, when he chose *Abraham*, and resolv'd to distinguish his posterity from all the inhabitants of the earth: thus he tells them by the prophet, ^b *because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is as an iron sinew, and thy brow as brass: I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shew'd it to thee: lest thou should'st say mine idol hath done them, and my graven image and my molten image hath commanded them.*

So that there was no disappointment with respect to him; nor did the event turn out otherwise than he foresaw. The design therefore of the remonstrance in the text, is to let them know, that nothing had been wanting on God's part, which they could reasonably expect or desire, and that their ingratitude

^a Acts ii. 23, 24.

^b Isaiah xlviii. 4, 5, 6.

ingratitude was the more inexcusable and provoking.

To this purpose the great Mr. *Calvin* observes on the text, " that doubtful expectation no more belongs to GOD, than repentance: GOD is never deceived as to his hope, yea he foretold the wickedness of the people, *Deut. xxxii. 15.* Nor does *Isaiab* nicely dispute here what GOD expected himself, but how the people ought to have behaved."

To the same purpose the late Dr. *Ridgely*, in his incomparable Body of divinity, remarks, " that in this passage, GOD condescends to speak of himself after the manner of men, as he often does in scripture, and is said to look for what might reasonably be expected, as the consequence of all the means of grace, which he had vouchsafed to them; the reasonableness of the thing is called his looking for it, as though he should say, it might have been expected, from the nature of the thing, that they who had been laid under such obligations, should express some gratitude for them, and so have brought forth some fruit to the glory of GOD; and those words which seem to attribute disappointment to him when 'tis said *I looked*, &c. signify nothing else but

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* Vid. in locum.

† Page 253.

“ the ingratitude of the people, that they
“ did not walk agreeably to the obligations
“ they were under ; not that God was
“ really disappointed, for that would mili-
“ tate against his omniscience : He knew
“ before he laid these obligations on them,
“ what their behaviour would be ; there-
“ fore had he had eyes of flesh, or seen as
“ man seeth, their behaviour would have
“ tended to disappoint him ; but there is
“ no disappointment in the divine mind,
“ tho’ the sin reprov’d in the people be the
“ same, as tho’ it had had a tendency to
“ defeat the divine purpose, or disappoint
“ his expectation.”

THUS most judiciously, as in common,
does that learned and accurate divine dis-
tinguish.

AND this I have the rather enlarged on,
as a sufficient reply to the objections of the
enemy, and as furnishing out an easy and
safe rule of interpreting many other such
like portions of scripture which have their
apparent difficulty.

THE words before us are introduced in
the form of a poem, dedicated, as I humbly
conceive, to our Lord Jesus Christ ; sure I
am he was Lord of the vineyard under the
old testament dispensation as he is now un-
der the new.

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HE is called the *beloved*, not only as he is infinitely dear to his father, his beloved son in whom his soul delighteth, but especially as expressive of the prophet's veneration for and affection to him; for *Isaiab* was well acquainted with his incomparable excellence: he saw his glory, foretold his sufferings, and triumph'd in the thought that *"in him should all the seed of Israel be justified and glory."*

THE parable made use of is exceeding beautiful, the images well chosen, apt to strike the mind, and engage the attention, easily gathered up, and applied by the weakest capacity, and more likely to be retained in memory than if unadorn'd with metaphor.

UNDER the similitude of a skilful careful husbandman, taking a great deal of pains with an unfruitful vine, GOD, in a most pathetic manner, expostulates with his professing people; that he had done much for them, and might justly have look'd for suitable returns; but they had ungratefully abus'd his kindness, by their impiety and disobedience.

THUS, in parable, the husbandman is represented as concerned for the situation of his vineyard; he looks out a *bill*, where vines usually flourish best, yea a *very fruitful*

* *Isaiah xlv. 25.*

ful bill, the original is exceeding strong, *the horn of the son of oyl*, that is, the richest soil, as tho' it were made fat with oyl. Thus you know the Lord brought his people out of *Egypt* thro' the wilderness, and destroying their enemies before them, planted them in a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, where they had a rich variety and large abundance of temporal blessings, and the yet greater advantage of the means of grace, and his ordinances publicly and statedly administered among them.

AGAIN, the husbandman is supposed to fence in his vineyard, or make a wall round about it, to secure it from the invasion of enemies, and the rude intrusion of strangers. Thus the Lord was himself as a wall of fire round his people, their glory in the midst of them, and on that glory a defence; whilst, in the wilderness, he was their guide and guard in that miraculous pillar of cloud by day, and fire by night, which attended them. And when in any tolerable measure they kept close to him, he suffered no enemy to hurt them, and caused the fear of them to fall on the nations round about them.

NOR were they without a sufficient security from the intrusion of strangers; as a garden inclosed, they were fenced in with

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privileges

privileges and solemnities, to which none had access but the seed of *Abraham*, or those who, as religious proselytes, were devoted to the GOD of *Israel*.

MOREOVER the husbandman is supposed to gather out the *stones*, lest they should hinder the fruitfulness of the vineyard, and to plant it with the *choicest vine*. This was true in the most absolute sense of our first parents whilst they retained their innocence; GOD made man upright, after his own image, pronouncing him on a review to be very good: and, in a comparative sense, it was true of *Abraham*, and the rest of the patriarchs, the immediate progenitors of this people; they were truly godly persons, men of great faith and piety, walking closely with GOD, and in the main doing what was pleasing in his sight.

IT is added, he *built a tower in it*, either for its greater security, or at pleasure to take a prospect of it; observing what part flourish'd, and where it wither'd or decay'd; and, that nothing might be wanting, the husbandman is supposed to build a *wine-press in the midst of it*: and, after all this labour and expence, he is represented as looking for fruit, but unhappily meets with nothing but wild grapes.

UPON which GOD, by the prophet bringing home the parable, lodges his appeal

peal with the inhabitants of ^a *Jerusalem*, and men of *Judah*, saying, *what could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?* Some translate it *what ought to have been done*; however, it is most evident it goes no farther than *externals*, not a word of changing the nature of the vine when it became corrupt, or of the rain from heaven to moisten it, or of the warm influence of the sun to enliven it. These are known to be out of the power, and therefore no business of the husbandman. And so, in the application of it, the question is not about *internal grace*, but *external privileges*, and the improvement or abuse of them: **GOD** had done enough to leave the people altogether inexcusable; the charge remained with them, they had most disingenuously rebelled, under a flow of unmerited mercy.

UPON this, in very awful language, he tells them what he was about to do in a way of resentment: ^b *go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be troden down. And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged, but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*

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THIS

^a Verse 4, 5.

^b Ver. 5, 6.

THIS was soon after fulfilled in their being given up into the hand of their enemies, when, during a grievous captivity for seventy years, the land lay almost universally desolate: and some have thought the loss of the means of grace, and the public ordinances of GOD's house, which lay buried in the ruins of the temple for the whole of that melancholy period, may be couch'd in that severe part of the threatening, *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*

THE account closes with an interpretation of the parable, *for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; and for righteousness, but behold a cry.* That is, there was little or no righteousness, or mercy, left among them; every one taking advantage of the ignorant and helpless, whose cry under the heavy weight of oppression came up into the ears of the Lord of hosts.

AND is it not a most mournful consideration, that this should ever have been the case with a professing people, a people called by the name of the Lord; yea, the only people he had then in the world, a nation whom he had laid under such repeated and distinguish-

distinguishing obligations, as one would have thought would necessary have issued in an inviolable attachment to his precepts. But oh the dreadful consequence of man's original apostacy! The unrenewed sinner, in the brightest sun-shine of prosperity, retains the enmity of a carnal mind, and flies in the face of his kind benefactor; nothing will, nothing can move him, till won over by the efficacy of almighty grace, blushing at his ingratitude, he humbles himself before God, and chearfully yields the obedience of faith.

AND now how should I rejoice, were it the will of God, to fall under your censure, as injudiciously fixing on a subject foreign to the present occasion: if with truth it could be said, tho' this might be the case with *Israel*, its far from being so with us, that God has no ground of controversy with us on this head; that our fruitfulness is in a good degree answerable to the divine culture and expence; happy desirable circumstance indeed! But, alas, who sees not that if ever God had matter of complaint against a people, he has against his *British Israel*; how justly may he take up the language of the text, and expostulate with us, saying, what could have been done, or what ought to have been done more for you, that I have not done? Wherefore
when

when I looked for grapes have you brought forth wild grapes? In evidence of which, and that we may be suitably affected with it, I propose,

- I. To single out a few, among the many favours, which, as a people, we have received from the hand of the Lord.
- II. INQUIRE what returns we have made him for his goodness.
- III. SHOW you what we may reasonably expect as the consequence of our ingratitude. And
- IV. WHAT is our duty and interest in the present situation.

WHAT have we then, in the first place, received from the good hand of God upon us as a nation? And here I pass over the temperature of our air, the fruitfulness of our soil, the advantageous situation we are in as to commerce, with many other temporal blessings, which, tho' too much slighted, have their value and importance: what I shall mention, are distinguishing favours, either not enjoy'd at all, or in the same degree, and for the same length of time, by any nation now under heaven. And is it not truly wonderful?

I. THAT the line of *election* should so remarkably have run among the inhabitants
of

of Great-Britain and Ireland, and our brethren of New-England, for so many years, I might say as to some of them, for many ages; however this may be treated by profane minds, it is matter of joyful praise to all the faithful.

IN the very dawn of the reformation we had our *Wickliff*, who bore a noble testimony against antichristian superstition, whose ministry and writings had their share of usefulness in detecting that man of sin, as well as the preaching of *Luther*, and the elaborate performances of the renown'd Mr. *Calvin*; and from that time to this, which is about three hundred and seventy years, God has been gathering to himself many choice jewels out of this nation.

TRUE it is, and with grief of heart I mention it, there is much less appearance of it in the present day than formerly; but I am persuaded, notwithstanding the general defection, there are as many, if not more, remaining with us who have not bow'd the knee to *Baal*, as can be found in the same compass of ground in any part of the world; wou'd to God there were many more! Now this must be resolv'd into the divine sovereignty; for we are not more in number than others, bearing little or no proportion to the inhabitants of the continent; nor have we as a people discover'd a better disposition:

position: no vice known in the world but has been found with us, and most of them in excess. It has therefore been altogether the Lord's doing, and ought to be marvellous in our eyes; That heaven for so long a time has been filling with holy men of God, called by his grace in these nations, is a singular instance of the divine goodness.

To fix the impression, let us consider how great a part of the world lies buried in *Pagan, Mahometan, and antichristian* darkness; I will not say God has not his hidden ones among them, but on the gospel institution, sure I am, the balance is greatly on our side: and let matchless distinguishing grace have all the glory.

2. THAT we have the scriptures of truth, with liberty to read them in our families; the gospel publicly and statedly preach'd, and the ordinances of God's house duly administered; are not the least among the many of our invaluable mercies,

THAT we are not tied down to an alchoran, or a mass-book, but have the sacred oracles in their purity and perfection, is a blessing which I am sure a *Protestant*, confin'd in *Turkey*, or *Spain*, would heartily bless God for; and tho' these advantages are treated with contempt by many; Our ancestors, who saw their teachers drove into corners, and were obliged to seek their spiritual

ritual food in the hazard of their lives, thought the greatest expence of blood and treasure little enough for their recovery. Many a one of them has been ready to say, give me a *barn*, or a *prison*, with my *bible*, rather than a *palace*, or *paradise*, without it.

I AM sorry to say we are greatly declin'd from the zeal of our forefathers in this respect; but, blessed be God, tho' the glory is on the threshold, it is not quite departed, the candlestick yet remains. And there are many churches among us where the gospel is preached in its purity; and the sacred institutions administer'd on the apostolic or scriptural plan. Nor ought we to forget,

3. THE great honour God has been putting on us as a people, in raising up so many godly, painful, eminently learned, and judicious divines, among us, who have been the glory of our land, and famous in their day for courage and skill, in asserting and maintaining the great truths of the gospel, in the face of all opposition.

THE very naming of them, from the reformation to our day, would be the work of a volume; but if the encomium of foreigners is not to be suspected of flattery, few have equalled, and, all things considered, none exceeded them.

Now if seven cities contended for the birth of a heathen poet, we ought at least to be thankful to providence, that so many burning and shining lights have appear'd in our land. Sure I am, in this respect, we have been long the wonder, not to say the envy of our neighbouring churches.

4. ANOTHER national mercy which we ought to be affected with, is the kind hand of providence upon us, as to the *princes* who have ruled over us, and the *manner* of their government.

THE greatest part of these, by far, for a course of many years, have been *Protestants*, or, at least, pretended to be so: and when any of them have begun to throw off the disguise, and attempt to put on us the anti-christian yoke, how surprisingly has God infatuated their counsels, and blasted their designs, spiring the friends of the gospel with courage, inspiring them with conduct, and crowning their endeavours with success, to a degree hardly look'd for by themselves, and much wonder'd at by others. Witness, to mention no other, that astonishing *revolution* brought about by our *illustrious hero*, of *immortal memory*, the *great*, the *good king William*.

MOREOVER we ought to reckon it a considerable mercy, to have our lot cast in a land where we are govern'd by *known laws*, and not
subject

subject to the cruel, or capricious humour of an arbitrary tyrant. Whatever others think, I believe it to be my duty, whilst in the possession of civil and religious liberty, to bless God for a *good king*, and a *good government*.

I MIGHT go on to observe, we have had *health, peace, and plenty*, beyond most of the nations round about us; and, if God has contended with us as to any of these, it has been in measure rather correcting us with a fatherly rod, than destroying us with the sword of his vengeance: nor are we yet given up to pestilence, famine, poverty, or contempt. Which leads me

X II. To enquire what returns we have made to the Lord for his wonderful goodness and mercy.

AND here, God forbid I should swell the account by groundless surmises, or extravagant aggravations; I shall therefore confine myself to a few things, which are too well known to be disputed, and are matter of grief and concern to all who are serious and thoughtful among us. As,

I. WHO sees not that an unusual spirit of *prophaneness* and *blasphemy* is broke forth in the midst of us. It has long been complain'd of, that the Lord had a controversy with the inhabitants of our land, on account of those horrid oaths, and shocking

imprecations, which have been continually pouring out of the lips of the ungodly : but, alas, we are gone much farther than this in the present day ; men are not only taking the name of GOD in vain, and sporting themselves with his vengeance, but there is a generation in the midst of us, who are scoffing at every thing of a religious nature, whilst they deny the necessity, and laugh at the authority, of the scriptures ; they treat the most awful and tremendous truths contain'd in that sacred volume with the utmost ridicule and contempt : several of these have appear'd of late in print, and, to the great scandal of a nation professing christianity, visibly make their court to the infidels and abandon'd of the age, by an uncommon stretch of impiety and obscenity. For my own part, when I read the titles of some modern pamphlets, I stand amazed at the patience of heaven ; surprized that the swiftest vengeance does not seize the detestable authors.

X
WHEN opposers pretend indeed to reason on a subject, tho' of the most sublime mysterious nature, and treat it with an appearance of decency, they are certainly to be heard : but when argument is turned into buffoonery, and men burlesque the bible, bantering the revelation of *Jesus* in a manner a *Julian* or an *Hobbs* would be asham'd of,

of; its a grievous indication of the height of deism and prophaneness: nor can I think the magistrate would exceed his commission, were he to interpose for their suppression. It is an abuse of liberty when men rudely affront the religion of their country, and what has a manifest tendency to deface all ideas of the excellence of *moral purity*, is undoubtedly cognizable by every legislature, and should meet with suitable discountenance. Shall a traytor justly receive the reward of his iniquity for cursing a good king, and the wretch who blasphemes his God, and reviles his Christ, pass on with impunity? Shall every one discover a proper jealousy for his own character, and demand, even of an enemy, to be treated with some degree of decency; and, when religion is the subject, run into a loose of ribaldry and prophaneness? as if we might take what liberty we pleased with the things of God, whilst we keenly resent the least appearance of incivility offered to ourselves: but the worst of the case is, these are caress'd as men of brighter genius, who have thrown off the prejudices of education, and nobly dare to walk in an unbeaten track; whilst the humble serious followers of Christ are born down with contempt, and branded with the charge of bigotry and enthusiasm.

2. Is it not a very affecting consideration, that so great a part of the nation is either wholly ignorant of, or warmly opposing some of the fundamental articles of christianity, which are so plainly revealed in scripture, and have been sealed by the blood of so many martyrs?

I BELIEVE it cannot with any face be denied, that the doctrines of a Trinity of persons in the divine essence, of sovereign grace, in choosing some to eternal life, of the effectual calling of a sinner by the influence of the Spirit of God, the justification of a believer by the righteousness of Christ, and the assured certainty of the saints perseverance: I say, it will not, I believe, be denied, that these were doctrines generally received by the greatest part of our reformers, as we have good proof in the articles of the church of *England* yet extant, which are a standing remonstrance to those who profess themselves to be of the establishment, and retain hardly any thing of it, but a few disputed ceremonial observances.

I TAKE not upon me to say how far it is true; but we have loud complaints, as if the greatest part of those who subscribe the articles of the church are in the very opposite scheme, and openly contradict in their ministry what they solemnly sign with their hands. And if we may credit some of those,
who,

who, retaining a love for Christ, and longing to know more of him, go from church to church eagerly expecting to hear his person exalted in the display of his glories; according to them, I say, it is a difficult matter to find faithful preachers of Christ, whilst we have swarms of the disciples of *Seneca* and *Epietetus*.

As to the main of the common people, its too evident, what knowledge and religion they have is confin'd at best to a negative virtue, with a very slender attendance to a form on some solemn occasions, and a general reliance on the mercy of GOD. As to evangelical repentance, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and communion with GOD, they know little more of them than the benighted heathen. And I am concerned to add, too many of them are taught, by the example of their irreligious guides, to make a scoff at every thing of a spiritual nature.

AND the case is yet worse with many who are called dissenters, especially of the rising generation; some of these have thrown off all restraints, and seem to quarrel with nothing so much as the GOD of their fathers. Socinianism and deism are their darling schemes; and, with many of them, to be almost, if not altogether, an infidel, is to be a man of understanding; and to receive any thing in religion but a *philosopher's*

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pher's creed, an argument of a weak mind, if not a dishonest one. And its generally observ'd, that none discover more enmity and bitterness against the truths of the gospel, than some of the offspring of those who lived and died in the comfortable persuasion of them. Nor,

X 3. ARE the morals of the nation less debauch'd than their principles corrupt; witness our public entertainments, which, according to the account we have of them, (for GOD forbid that any under a profession of religion shou'd attend them) would make a sober heathen blush and be confounded; among which I cannot but mention the *midnight promiscuous assemblies* of persons of distinction as a crying abomination.

As to the Lord's-day, it is generally wasted in indolence, or prophaned by journeys of pleasure and impertinent visits; whilst some are got to such a pitch of wickedness, that, without fear, they devote the sacred time to gaming, lewdness, or drunkenness. And now I have mention'd intemperance, how shameful is it to observe it should prevail to such a degree, not only among *men* of every age and character, but that the *sex* which has been justly distinguish'd so long for modesty and sobriety, should of late so strangely forget itself, as to vie with the most abandon'd in drinking
to

to excess; to their disgrace, loss of health, and the reproach, if not destruction of their families.

As to luxury in dress, furniture, and entertainments, its increas'd to a degree which would be incredible to our ancestors; and I can't but wonder to hear some persons complain of the decay of trade, and want of business, who visibly outlive their income, wasting their substance in pride and extravagance.

BUT, to shut up this part of the account, good men have much lamented, as a national reproach, the multiplying of oaths among us, by which they are become so cheap, that many pay little regard to them, and take them as a matter of form rather than of conscience. And some have not scrupled to say it is establishing iniquity by law, to prostitute the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper, in making it a civil qualification. Nor,

4. ARE those who make the strictest profession of godliness without their blemishes. Far be it from me to enter a charge against my honoured *fathers* or *brethren* in the ministry, or say any thing which may justly offend the generation of the righteous: but give me leave to wish, that some of us, as ministers, did not so much confine ourselves to our own par-

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ticular charges, and neglect to come out to the help of the Lord. And it might be for our honour to discover a proper courage and resolution when we are called by providence, to cry aloud and spare not in showing sinners their transgressions.

WERE the truths of the day and time more closely and constantly attended to, it might probably check and rebuke the enemy, to find that those who are set for the defence of the gospel, are ready, upon every occasion, to meet him in the gate. Were there a more earnest concern for the good of hearers, and an honest plain address to conscience; were we more solicitous to win souls than please the ear, or gain applause, we might comfortably hope for greater success, whilst it would yield a peaceful reflection in the want of it.

AND as to our churches, is there not ground of jealousy, that some are too remiss in the manner of receiving members, and sadly careless about their walk when in fellowship; little, very little, of that spirit of *prayer* and *seriousness* for which our forefathers were so famous: few discover a concern whether the work of conversion goes forward, and the gospel be attended with success, or no: how contented and easy are we if the things of the world go well with us,

us; whether *Zion* prospers or declines.

AND oh what a visible indolence and formality is discover'd in hearing of the word! some are wholly unattentive, being absent in mind, tho' present in person; others dwell rather on the eloquence of the preacher, than the importance of the message deliver'd in the name of the Lord. And I am grieved to say, that many who have given up their names to gospel churches, make so little conscience of filling up their places at the table of the Lord, as if it were a matter of indifference whether they fulfilled their engagements in remembering his dying love.

AND whilst some churches are sunk into a spirit of sloth and formality, it is pity there should be any, unhappily grieving their ministers, and threatening their own destruction, by a spirit of pride, contention, and debate.

As to the families of professors, how melancholy is the thought, that so little, even of the form of godliness, is to be seen among them? Are not many of them living from year to year in the total neglect of prayer, and, except a *chapter*, or a *psalm*, hastily run over on a Lord's-day evening, have no more of the word of God among them than *Mahometans*, or *Pagans*. And,

I am afraid, if the question was put to the closets of some under an high profession of godliness, how often they are made use of, and what sort of worship is perform'd there, the testimony would be to their disgrace and confusion. Alas! we seem to have hardly any desire after God, and have strangely dropt our concern about an intercourse with him.

WHERE almost is that seriousness and spiritual savour discovering itself in the conversation of saints, That desire to improve every occasion to mutual edification; that tenderness of conscience and holy fear of offending God, which was so visible in the ancient puritans? How is the man of God to be distinguish'd from the man of the world? Politics and scandal have too much taken place among us, whilst religious conference lies neglected, if not despised.

AND what looks most threatening is, we are, for the most part, secure and unaffected: tho' grey hairs are thus every where upon us, few feel themselves stirred up to lay hold of a departing God. Which brings me

III. To consider what we may expect from the hand of the Lord, if another and better spirit is not soon seen in the midst of us.

AND

stated and reprov'd.

AND this may easily be gather'd from attending to the unchangeable purity of his nature, the jealousy he has for his glory, and the exceeding greatness of his power.

GOD has many awful arrows in his quiver, and can, at pleasure, draw out any one of them. He is at no difficulty to avenge himself of his enemies, and can easily destroy them. He may bear long, but it is not to be expected he will bear always. He has exercised much patience toward us already, and seems to have been saying, *how shall I give you up, how shall I make you as Admah, and set you as Zeboim?* We are not however without the manifold symptoms of his displeasure; for, besides those spiritual judgments which the righteous are mourning over, such as a visible departure of GOD from his people, a sad decay of the exercise of grace, few seals to the ministry, an almost universal complaint of the want of comfort, and general degeneracy of the rising generation; we are at war with one nation, and how soon we may be with another we know not; some are in daily expectation of it: and when the sword is drawn, who knows what may be the issue? Sure we are, it has been attended with a vast expence of treasure, and, as the usual consequence of war, we have a general complaint

plaint of the decay of trade, and, in some parts of the nation, a dreadful scarcity of provision; but these seem rather, at present, to be as so many warnings from God, which, if not duly attended to, may be the harbingers of his sorest judgments. We have heard what he did to his vineyard of old for its unfruitfulness, *how he took away the hedge thereof, and it was eaten up: broke down the wall thereof, and it was trodden down. Laid it waste: it was no more to be pruned, nor digged, and there came up briars and thorns in it: and he commanded the clouds to rain no rain upon it.* And we have no reason to expect a continued exemption from punishment, whilst our guilt is equal, or rather more aggravated.

WHAT if GOD in anger should say of our *Israel*, "They have done with me as to
 " reverence and duty, and I have done with
 " them as to care and protection? Let the
 " hedge be broke down, let no rain fall
 " henceforth on the *British* assemblies; I
 " will give them up to deserved barrenness.
 " They have trifled with, and despised my
 " gospel long enough; I will take it now
 " away, and send it to a nation which shall
 " bring forth the fruits of it." What if
 GOD should pour contempt on the pride of
 the rising generation, who value themselves
 so

so highly on their reason and understanding by suffering Pagan or antichristian darkness once more to take place. For my own part, when I think of the horrid lengths men are running in the present day, and the sad declension and apostacy of professors, I cannot but conclude things will not long remain in their present situation; GOD will some way or other *arise*, awfully *arise*, and vindicate his own glory: and perhaps this had been the case to the destruction of our nation 'ere this, but for the strong cries and tears of GOD's hidden ones, who are fighting over the abominations committed in the midst of us. Which leads me

Lastly, To a word or two as to our duty in our present circumstances.

AND surely it becomes us to lay it to heart as a very evil and bitter thing, that GOD should be so dishonour'd by the inhabitants of our land. Let us grieve for the reproaches which daily fall on him, and lament over the blasphemies of the prophane, the contempt which is cast on the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the despite offer'd to the holy Spirit. We can hardly be said to have a regular zeal for GOD, or love to our country, if, on this occasion, we are not ready to join the prophet, and say, *oh that our heads were waters, and our eyes*

eyes a fountain of tears, that we might weep day and night for the provoking abominations of an ungrateful people.

AGAIN let us boldly appear for God and bear a constant testimony against all heresy in principle, and wickedness in conversation; nor suffer an enemy to wound our dearest Lord, without discovering a proportionable resentment. Let us not be afraid of the faces of men, but honestly reprove immorality and prophaneness wherever we meet with it: in this we shall maintain a good conscience towards God, and it will yield a comfortable reflection in a dying hour.

LET us deal impartially with our own souls, and charging them with the obligations God has laid us under to love and serve him, bring them to a strict account, inquiring whether we have not greatly lost our first love, and neglected our first works? whether we are as serious and conscientious, as humble and faithful, as formerly, and as our profession and expectations call for? and where we discover a defect, as to the exercise of grace, and the diligent discharge of personal, or relative duty, let us ingenuously acknowledge it; and humbling ourselves before the Lord, cry mightily for pardoning mercy in the blood of Jesus, and for fresh supplies of grace from the holy Spirit. Let

us^a take with us words, and return to the Lord, saying, take away all iniquity from us, and receive us graciously; and so will we render the calves of our lips. And as the residue of the Spirit is with him, and it is his peculiar glory to revive his work in the midst of the years, let us besiege his throne with united importunity, and never leave following him with our cries till we have comfortably obtain'd the blessing. Let us take up the language of Daniel, and, say^b *We have sinned and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, by departing from the divine precepts and judgments, we have not obey'd the voice of the Lord. Unto him belongeth righteousness, but unto us confusion of face.* Let us plead with him, O Lord hear, O Lord forgive, O Lord hearken and do, defer not, for thine own sake, for we are called by thy name. Or with the prophet Jeremiah, *Though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy names sake: our backslidings are many, and we have sinned against thee. But O thou, the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in a time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a man astonish'd, as a mighty man that cannot save? art thou not as yet in the midst of us? are we not called by thy name? leave us not.* ^cO look down from heaven, and
E behold

^a Hosea xiv. 2.
^c Jer. xiv. 7, 9.

^b Dan. ix. 5, 10, 19.
^d Isaiah lxiii. 15, 16.

34. *The Abuse of Mercy*

behold from the habitation of thy holiness, and of thy glory: where is thy zeal, and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards us, are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, and our redeemer, thy name is from everlasting.

AGAIN, Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth more able faithful labourers into his vineyard, and cheerfully encourage every design which is calculated to promote so desirable an end. And here I cannot but make an honourable mention of your society, which, for years past, has been employ'd to find out young men, who appear to have the grace of God, as the only proper persons to be encouraged in their studies for the ministry; which, if it had duly been attended to by others, we had not, in all probability, laboured under the reproach of so many raw unexperienc'd novices, unskilful in the word of righteousness.

WE have already seen the good success of this undertaking, and may hope for much more, if the Lord should lay it on the hearts of those who have it in the power of their hands to assist in it. And I cannot but look on it as a token for good, that the *monthly exercises*, set up by this society, have been so well attended, and honoured with so much of the divine presence.

To

To conclude, Let us look over the promises relating to the glory of the latter day, and rest assur'd, that notwithstanding all the opposition of earth and hell, they shall have their accomplishment.

THE church is safe whilst God is in the midst of her.

Zion will yet be the praise of the whole earth.

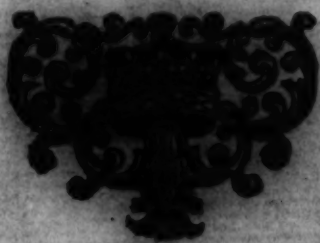
AND as dark as the present prospect is, light will break forth to the joy of the humble followers of the lamb, and the confusion of their enemies.

IN the expectation of which, let us believingly pray, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."* Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

"Matth. vi. 10.

"Rev. xxii. 20.

F I N I S.



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